

**Testimony before the Appropriations Committee on the Governor's Budget**

**Public Hearing Date: February 23, 2017**

**Linda G. Pikul, MSN, RN, BC**

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Senator Formica, Senator Osten, Representative Walker and members of the Appropriations Committee:

My name is Linda Pikul and I am a registered voter in Norwalk, CT. I am also a Registered Nurse who has worked in the mental health field for over forty years in the State of CT.

I am writing to testify regarding HB7027, an act concerning the State Budget and most importantly, the proposed consolidation / cut to the Regional Mental Health Boards which would, if passed, obliterate those entities.

I have been on the Board of Directors for the Southwest Regional Mental Health Board for the past three years. I have witnessed the very important work the Regional Mental Health Boards do in our communities with the purpose of ensuring that the services provided to our most vulnerable citizens, persons with serious mental health illnesses, are of the highest quality. The Regional Mental Health Boards ensure that services are available to all people needing them, advocating for those who are not able to do so for themselves, assisting family members that are impacted by mental illness or substance abuse, and supporting those impacted by mental health issues or substance abuse to have a voice in the development, realization, and provision of services. Moreover, the Boards also work to educate people and reduce the stigma often associated with mental illness or substance abuse. If the proposed consolidation / cut to The Regional Mental Health Boards were passed it would in effect, eliminate all the important advocating, monitoring, educating, ongoing reviews, and assistance provided by these Boards. Additionally, the Regional Mental Health Boards are a vital and valuable resource to all of our communities in CT. The empowerment they provide to the most vulnerable people and their families should in no way be underestimated.

The Regional Mental Health Boards also provide an independent, objective, and external assessment of state funded programs. If the privatization of services within the state becomes a reality in the next few years, this function provided by the Board becomes even more important. I know of no other external organization in the state that provides this independent, community based assessment. Additionally, in order for CT to receive \$23 million in federal funding for our state, the Boards act as a conduit to administer the mental health needs assessment which is required to receive this funding.

Unfortunately, in the nation and our state we are hearing or reading everyday of a new tragedy involving someone who has mental health issues or substance abuse issues. We have seen too much tragedy right here in CT, be it Sandy Hook or the increasing numbers of suicides or deaths by opioid overdoses. Clearly, our elected officials as well as every citizen should see the vital need to minimally maintain if not increase and expand mental health services and support not eliminate the Regional Mental Health Boards.

I implore you to see the seriousness and gravity of what consolidating or cutting these services in any measure would mean for the people of our state. I urge you to restore these harmful if not devastating cuts to ensure that crucial services are available to the people of Connecticut.

Thank you for your continued support on behalf of people with mental health and substance abuse disorders.

Linda G. Pikul, MSN, RN BC

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